

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02 OMB-01 /080 W

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R 291241Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8674

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MANILA

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AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 14407

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IN, UK

SUBJECT: BRITISH POLITICIANS VISIT INDIA

1. MRS. MARGARET THATCHER (CONSERVATIVE) AND MR. JEREMY THORPE (LIBERAL) WERE IN DELHI DURING THE LAST WEEK AND MR. MICHAEL FOOT (LABOR) WILL BE HERE NEXT WEEK FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH INDIAN POLITICIANS AND OFFICIALS. THORPE WAS HERE ON HIS OWN WHILE THATCHER AND FOOT ARE GUESTS OF THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT.

2. THE UK HICOMM HAS HEARD THAT THE DECISION TWO WEEKS AGO TO DROP RESTRICTIONS ON FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS IN INDIA STEMMED FROM A SERIES OF CABLES FROM INDIAN HICOMM B.K. NEHRU IN LONDON, FIRST TO MININFO AND BROADCASTING
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V.C. SHUKLA AND SUBSEQUENTLY TO THE PM HERSELF UNDERSCORING

THE EMBARRASSMENT OF REFUSING PERMISSION TO THE CORRESPONDENTS ACCOMPANYING MRS. THATCHER TO INDIA UNLESS THEY SIGNED THE PREVIOUSLY REQUIRED ASSURANCE ON THEIR REPORTING ACCORDING TO INDIAN GUIDELINES. SHUKLA STEADFASTLY REFUSED BUT WAS OVERRULED BY MRS. GANDHI AT THE LAST MINUTE. THIS IN FACT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THE VISITS.

3. THE UK HICOMM HAS SHOWN US THEIR MEMOS ON THE SEPARATE MEETINGS BETWEEN MRS. THATCHER AND MRS. GANDHI, DEFMIN BANSI LAL, FONMIN CHAVAN, VICE CHAIRMAN OF PLANNING COMMISSION P. N. HAKSAR, AND VARIOUS OPPOSITION MPS, AND THORPE'S MEETINGS WITH MRS. GANDHI AND OPPOSITION MPS. ALL THE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN MRS. GANDHI AND OTHER GOI LEADERS AND THE BRITISH MPS WERE MARKED BY REPETATIVE JUSTIFICATIONS BY MRS. GANDHI OF THE EMERGENCY AND EXPLANATIONS OF THE BENEFITS WHICH HAD PRECEDED FROM IT. THORPE NOTED HOW LITTLE MRS. GANDHI SEEMED TO BE AWARE OF A NUMBER OF MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS: ON AFRICA SHE SEEMED VAGUE ABOUT WHY SHE WAS VISITING TANZANIA AND ZAMBIA; HER KNOWLEDGE OF THE CIEC WAS VIRTUALLY NIL AND SHE ASKED ONE OF HER SECRETARIAT FOR AN EXPLANATORY MEMO ON THE DISCUSSIONS WHILE THORPE WAS PRESENT. SHE CHARACTERIZED THE BANGLADESHIS AS A "DIFFICULT LOT"; OBSERVED THAT BHUTTO'S CONTROL IN PAKISTAN WAS COMPLETE AND THAT HE WAS BEING FRIENDLY AT PRESENT BUT WAS UNPREDICTABLE; RELATIONS WITH CHINA SHE SAW AS CONTINUING ON THEIR CURRENT FORMAL BASIS WITH NO NEW STEPS IN THE NEAR FUTURE (NEW DELHI 14241); AND SHE EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT THORPE'S OBSERVATION THAT INDIA SEEMED TO BE PAYING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO SEA, INSISTING THAT INDIA HAD NO STRONG INTEREST IN CLOSER RELATIONS WITH THAT AREA. SHE AGREED WITH THORPE THAT INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS WERE GOOD BUT THAT THEY COULD BE BETTER.

4. ON CURRENT DOMESTIC ISSUES, SHE TOLD THORPE THAT WHILE SHE HAD BEEN STEADILY RELEASING POLITICAL PRISONERS, THOSE RELEASED WERE ALREADY CAUSING TROUBLE AND WERE PARTICULARLY ACTIVE AGAINST THE FAMILY PLANNING CAMPAIGN. SHE SAID THE CPI WAS TRYING TO HAVE THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS BY BOTH

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SUPPORTING AND CRITICIZING HER GOVERNMENT AND OBSERVED POINTEDLY THAT SHE COULD GET ALONG WITH THE CPI. SHE DODGED ALL QUESTIONS ON WHEN THE EMERGENCY MIGHT END, WHEN SHE MIGHT HOLD ELECTIONS, WHEN OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADERS LIKE MORARJI DESAI WOULD BE RELEASED, AND HOW MANY PRISONERS WERE BEING HELD UNDER THE EMERGENCY (" I DON'T KNOW MYSELF", SHE CLAIMED.) THORPE SAID MRS. GANDHI HAD SHOWN CONSIDERABLE ANGER IN TALKING ABOUT INDUSTRIALISTS WHOM SHE DESCRIBED

AS "DECEITFUL, UNRELIABLE, AND ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO
SALT AWAY MONEY."

5. MRS. THATCHER WAS VAGUER IN DESCRIBING HER CON-
VERSATIONS WITH MRS. GANDHI THAN MR. THROPE WAS WITH THE
HICOMM, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE GENERAL GIST OF HER
CONVERSATION WENT VERY MUCH IN PARALLEL WITH THAT OF
THROPE. IN NEITHER CONVERSATION DID MRS. GANDHI APPARENTLY
MENTION THE U.S. SHE EXPRESSED HER GENERAL DESIRE FOR
FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THE UK, A VIEW WHICH WAS SUMMARIZED
BY MEA JOINT SECRETARY (WESTERN EUROPE) GOKHALE TO A
HICOMMOFF WHEN HE DESCRIBED THE VISITS AS "LONG OVERDUE".

6. ONBILATERAL ISSUES, ANSI LAL DID NOT DISCUSS ARMS
PURCHASES WITH MRS. THATAHER AND MRS. GANDHI DID NOT SEEM
PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE INDIAN IMMIGRANT PROBLEM
IN THE UK IN HER MEETINGS WITH EITHER WITH THATCHER OR THROPE.
MRS. THATCHER, HOWEVER, HAD TWO LONG SESSIONS AT THE
HIGH COMMISSION ON INDIAN IMMIGRATION. WHILE THE HIGH
COMMISSION FELT SHE MAY HAVE RETURNED TO THE UK WITH A
SOMEWHAT CLEARER VIEW OF THE PROBLEM, THEY ALSO SUSPECT THAT
THE ONLY REAL POLITICAL FALL-OUT FROM THE TRIP MAY BE IN
TERMS OF SOME TOUGH TORY TALK ON THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE WITH
MRS. THATCHER FALLING BACK ON HER "EXPERTISE" DERIVED FROM
THE INDIA VISIT. AT THE SAME TIME, THE HIGH COMMISSION
HAS A VAGUE FEELING THAT AT LEAST SOME OF THE REPETATIVE
JUSTIFICATIONS OF THE EMERGENCY AND THE CURRENT DOMESTIC
SITUATION MAY HAVE RUBBED OFF ON BOTH THORPE AND THATCHER
AND THAT THEY MAY HAVE LEFT SOMEWHAT MORE PERSUADED OF THE
BENEFITS OF THE EMERGENCY THAN PREVIOUSLY.

7. SEPTELS SUMMARIZE TWO INTERVIEWS BY BRITISH JOURNALISTS
ACCOMPANYING MRS. THATCHER TO INDIA WITH MRS. GANDHI
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AS WELL AS INTERVIEWS AND STATEMENTS BY MRS. THATCHER AND
MR. THORPE TO INDIAN AUDIENCES.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, FOREIGN RELATIONS, VISITS, POLITICAL LEADERS, THE PRESS, INFORMATION CONTROL
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NEWDE14407
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760370-0769
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976098/aaaaagag.tel
Line Count: 157
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <26 APR 2004 by CollinP0>; APPROVED <13 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BRITISH POLITICIANS VISIT INDIA
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IN, UK, (THATCHER, MARGARET), (THORPE, JEREMY), (FOOT, MICHAEL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006